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INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR MARCHETTE

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW TUCKER: Yesterday was the one time I was able to pick up a phone, and somebody said, not irately, but a little tartly, "You had a wonderful guest on this morning. It was Victor Marchette. What was the name of his book." And I said "The Rope Dancer," and gave the publishing house - forget what it was now - Crosset & Dunlap it was. And he said, "You know, really, you didn't give him enough time, you ought to have him on tomorrow morning." And I was able to say, "We're going to have him on tomorrow morning." Kind of a good feeling.

Let me read the credentials here, in case you missed yesterday's show. My next guest is Victor Marchette. He was a high ranking CIA officer, who left the CIA after fourteen years, and he has written a novel. Now this is a novel, called "The Rope Dancer." And, needless to say, it's about organizations.

Anyway, good morning, Victor.

VICTOR MARCHETTE: Good morning, John. And good morning, Mr. Helms.

TUCKER: Who's Mr. Helms?

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MARCHETTE: He's the Director of CIA, and I assume by now they know I'm up in New York talking to you. They probably have a transcript of yesterday's show by now.

TUCKER: Already?

MARCHETTE: Oh, yeah. When I worked up in the executive suite, in the afternoon we would get a package of transcripts from TV shows, radio shows, press clippings, anything that mentioned CIA. And it would be passed around for the executives to read and know about.

TUCKER: In other words, you mean, somebody from the CIA would monitor this show every day?

MARCHETTE: Yes, I guess so. They have girls that monitor the press, and clip it. I imagine they have people watching the TV programs and radio shows.

TUCKER: I hope our girl's attractive. If I were you I'd call in. It's not really funny, is it? Or is it? I don't know.

MARCHETTE: Well, actually it's very harmless. But it does point up their great sensitivity to publicity, any kind of publicity.

TUCKER: Yesterday we established something that astounded me: about fifteen percent - am I right - of the total budget for Intelligence goes to the CIA.

MARCHETTE: That's right.

TUCKER: I would assume you guys got the bulk. Where does the other eighty-five percent go? I didn't have time to ask yesterday.

MARCHETTE: It goes to the various agencies that are actually part of the Pentagon setup. The National Security Agency gets

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well over a billion dollars a year. And then you have DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency. The National Reconnaissance Organization - this is the group that's in charge of the satellites, the spies in the skies. And various other, lesser Intelligence operations, such as mapping and charting, the attache system. This accounts for over five billion dollars a year, the Pentagon side of the ledger. The remainder goes to CIA.

The CIA does, though, reap the benefit of part of this, and some of this big eighty billion dollar budget that the Department of Defense has. For example, in Laos, while CIA was only spending out of its own pocket something like twenty-five million a year to finance the Mayos (?) - because they come pretty cheap, I think they fight for something like eight cents a day - the rest of the money, the money for the bombing raids, for the ordinance used, the other air support, was buried in the Defense Department's budget, military budget, separate from the Intelligence budget.

And Secretary Laird recently announced, the news broke yesterday, that the war was actually costing close to half a billion dollars a year, CIA's private war in Laos.

TUCKER: The thing that concerns a lot of us, and I guess you one of the reasons you quite - does the President of the United States know half the time what the CIA is doing? When you guys, when the CIA, I guess, began this war, according to Defense Secretary Laird, did the President himself, much less Congress, know that we were in there?

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MARCHETTE: Yes, I think the President knew. But the problem is that only the President and some key advisors, a few key Administration officials, are aware of these developing situations. A few of the senior chairman of the joint subcommittees in the Senate, and some of the House subcommittees, would be apprised of these developments. But we would have maybe a dozen people or so, in Washington, maybe, other than some working stiffs, that would be aware of this.

This is one of my complaints. I think that we should have more checks and balances on the Intelligence system. It should not be a play toy of the executive branch, to use as it sees fit, without any answering to a broad Congressional overview, or, for that matter, to the people.

TUCKER: I was just thinking, you said transcripts of this show, or any show you look at; and then say you've got an operation going in Laos, and a handful of people know, Congress itself doesn't know. How many members of Congress, the Senate, are under the surveillance of the CIA?

MARCHETTE: To my knowledge, none. I honestly believe that they do not participate in that kind of hanky-panky. That's the FBI's bailiwick. According to what I read in the papers.

TUCKER: As far as you know, Senator Mansfield wasn't tapped, or followed.

MARCHETTE: No.

TUCKER: What's the criterion for deciding you're going to find out some Intelligence about an individual, a citizen of the United States? Who decides that?

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MARCHETTE: Well, I guess it would depend on the situation. If it's an internal situation, the FBI is in charge. If it's a matter of foreign Intelligence, the CIA has responsibility. Now there is an overlap here, obviously, and those have to be ironed out on an issue by issue basis.

When the student trouble began a few years ago, since the CIA had had quite a bit of access in the student movement - you remember the National Security Association scandal of a few years ago - well, they had these tremendous assets. These assets were, however, targeted against the Soviet programs, and largely overseas.

There was a great temptation at this time to get into the domestic picture. There was a lot of scuttlebutt going around in the agency about whether or not we should do it. And people flirted with it. But they, to the best of my knowledge, never did actually get involved. But the danger is there. They were flirting with it, they were thinking about it.

When some of these operations blew up subsequently at peace movements, and at the universities, it was discovered that the people who were spying on the students were the FBI and the military Intelligence, Counterintelligence units.

TUCKER: You were the equivalent of a colonel.

MARCHETTE: Yes, a full colonel.

TUCKER: How many names are on the file of CIA?

MARCHETTE: Quite a few. But most of them are foreign names, people of interest to...

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TUCKER: Excuse me, some of these people are going to leave early. I never showed your book this morning, really. It's called "The Rope Dancer," by Marchette, Victor Marchette. Crosset & Dunlap. If you'd like to call in, our number is 870-9100.

Did you ever work as a spy, because when you say CIA, I think of a spy.

MARCHETTE: Yes...

TUCKER: You have worked as a spy?

MARCHETTE: No.

TUCKER: You'd be a good one, I think. You look like an American businessman, or something.

MARCHETTE: No, I never really worked as a spy. My experience in operations was all at headquarters.

TUCKER: You were in Intelligence...

MARCHETTE: But I know a lot of our -- they're not actually spies. The people who work for the agency I guess would be, in the parlance of the uninitiated, the master spy. He's actually referred to as a case officer. He handles a case. In the case you have agents. These are the people that are hired to do the actual spying.

TUCKER: You've met a lot of these. Are any of them romantic?

MARCHETTE: Yes.

TUCKER: They are? They're like the movies, or like the James Bond novels.

MARCHETTE: Some of them are very flamboyant.

TUCKER: Hi, there, I'm a spy.

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MARCHETTE: One fellow I met had a big handlebar moustache; he used to drive around Vienna in a white Jaguar. He practically had a neon sign on him, saying I'm a CIA case officer. But it worked very well.

And in the espionage training, when I was being trained, I actually heard a debate between two senior and very capable clandestine officers, one of whom advocated complete secrecy and deep cover. No one should know who you are, or where you are, or anything about you. The traditional approach. And he justified it from his own experience.

The other fellow was the exact opposite. He said, "I walked all around the country I was in, in the capital, telling everybody who I was." And he said, "How the hell are they going to know where to come if they don't know who I am?"

TUCKER: I'm your local spy.

MARCHETTE

MARCHETTE: Yeah, I'm your local CIA man.

TUCKER: What kind of training do they get, though? You said training. Do they get any combat training, or...?

MARCHETTE: Well, they give them...

TUCKER: James Bond is always going down to the armorer, and he's got a new pistol for him, or something like that.

MARCHETTE: Not too much of that. The average officer is given a general training program, which includes a certain amount of familiarization with weaponry, parachute, infiltration through barbed, land mined areas. But this is more of just a familiarization. His basic work is going to be dealing with civilized

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and fairly sophisticated human beings in urban situations. And he's going to have to do most of his work with his head.

Now there are special cases when a man has to be trained as a demolitions expert, or as a paratrooper, underwater work, and so forth. At this point they then go into great depth in their training, and they're very good at it, actually.

TUCKER: Can you tell from these hands that I was once a demolition expert?

MARCHETTE: At least you have all your fingers.

TUCKER: Yeah, they're all there, still. Before we take some phone calls, and I'd like to, I keep forgetting, now that we're talking, that we haven't been talking straight through since yesterday. And I never asked you to explain how you got into the CIA, which we talked about yesterday, and why you got out of it.

MARCHETTE: Well, I got into it because in 1955 the Cold War was at its height, and I believed that the CIA was then the first line of defense against Communism, and I was very patriotic and wanted to do my bit.

In the next fourteen or fifteen years the times changed, and I feel that the agency, and the Intelligence community didn't keep pace with the times. I think they're living in the past.

These PM operations in Southeast Asia are an example of not facing up to the fact that the world is changing and there are certain things we cannot do about it.

TUCKER: Paramilitary, is that what you mean by PM? Guerrilla?

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MARCHEPPE: Yes, exactly. I felt that there was too much waste in the community, too much money being spent on the wrong things, redundancy. Every time CIA had a big technical program, the Army had to have one. Every time somebody got an idea for a new way of coming up with information, expensive technical collections, then they'd have two different agencies would compete, and you'd always end up with two systems, or one that didn't work - but you paid for two.

I felt there was not enough direction and control. This is a key point. I think more people in Congress, more people in the government, should be apprised of the activities of the CIA and the U.S. Intelligence community, and of the results of this. The Intelligence should not be delivered to just a few people for them to use or not to use, depending on their biases. It should be delivered to a broader group of policy makers who have an opportunity to debate it and see if it fits, or if it's germane to the problem.

And the third big reason was, I just literally got fed up with the military influence in Intelligence. While I may criticize CIA quite a bit, after all, it was my outfit, they are, by comparison with the military outfits, terrific. And if CIA had a little more power, a little more control within the community, while still having on top of it the proper direction and control, I think we'd have a much, much better Intelligence organization.

TUCKER: All right, let's take some calls now. You may have answered a lot of questions that would come in now. You're on the air, good morning..

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WOMAN: Good morning, John.

TUCKER: Good morning. Yeah?

WOMAN: I would like to ask Mr. Marchette, since his leaving the CIA, has he been approached by any strange or foreign powers in any way that he would recognize?

MARCHETTE: Not to my knowledge I haven't.

WOMAN: I would enjoy reading your book, which I will do. However I question, after being entertained to a certain extent, how much of it might be sour grapes, or perhaps how much I wouldn't want to know about the CIA.

MARCHETTE: Well, I'm not revealing - to answer your second question first - I'm not revealing any national secrets in the book. The book is fictional. The events, the background, the personalities are realistic in the sense that they're based on true occurrences. Only everything is switched around for fictional purposes, and I've taken a certain amount of poetic license.

There is, I will admit, some sour grapes in the book. It comes out largely through the hero, whom I think I've drawn in a very, very realistic fashion. I think he is typical of many officers of my rank and experience, who were bitter, and didn't know what to do about it. I just took this fellow to the extreme.

WOMAN: Well, I wish you luck, and I hope you do more informative work than any harm. I'm sure you're not going to.

TUCKER: Well, we thank you for calling.

WOMAN: Best of luck.

MARCHETTE: Thank you.

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TUCKER: Here we go, you're on the air, good morning. Hello, there?

WOMAN: Hello?

TUCKER: Yeah, you're on the air.

WOMAN: What Mr. Marchette has said about Mr. Helm watching the program, and having people watch, does he think that there's any reprisals that he might get for speaking as he has about the CIA and the book?

MARCHETTE: No, they won't take any reprisals because what I'm doing is perfectly legal, and while they don't like it, I'm sure, there's no reason why they should take any reprisals.

WOMAN: Well, you hear about when they don't like things, they do take care of them.

MARCHETTE: A lot of that is just rumour. The agency is a fairly honourable organization, despite my criticisms of it.

WOMAN: Well, being fairly honourable--isn't that like being slightly pregnant?

(LAUGHTER)

TUCKER: Touche.

MARCHETTE: Well, yes, I guess so. But I would say that on this particular issue of a former officer leaving and writing a novel and then speaking his piece, in a critical but hopefully constructive fashion, they will handle that in a bureaucratic fashion behind the scenes in Washington but there'll be no overt action taken against me.

WOMAN: All right. Thank you very much.

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TUCKER: Thank you for calling. Good question. You're on the air. Good morning.

MAN: Good morning. I'm wondering if Mr. Marchette, in his spare time--which spy novels does he read? Which ones does he feel are the most true to life?

MARCHETTE: Well, actually, I think that of all the spy novels I've read--and this includes the famous James Bond stories, John LeCarre's,--are not very realistic. This is...

TUCKER: How about Len Deighton? I want to get mine in. I like this question. Huh?

MARCHETTE: I'm--let's say I'm not familiar with that one.

TUCKER: Okay. I interrupted. Go ahead.

MARCHETTE: I gave up reading spy novels, as quite a few of the people in the CIA have, because they're just not realistic enough. This is one of the reasons why I wrote this. I wanted people to know what it's really like in the business, and what the real problems are.

The most realistic books on espionage...

TUCKER: Page 170 says--I just happened to have picked this up; excuse me; wow! Read page 170, quick!

(LAUGHTER)

MARCHETTE: The most realistic books on espionage are the memoirs by former spies. These are very good: Colonel Vennerstrom's memoirs, Kim Philby's, the--there's a fellow, John Seminac who wrote, who was an FBI agent. These people who really--Neville--or--Wynn, the fellow who was Penkovsky's contact agent, he wrote

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a book on it called "Gorky Street: Contact on Gorky Street."
These are very realistic, and very true-to-life, and one thing
you're going to find out in this is most of these characters are
not terribly romantic or exciting, and their work is often very
dull.

MAN: Um-hmm. Well, I'd always felt that's what Eric Ambler
always played up--the fact that you have an ordinary man cast
into a strange kind of role, you know.

MARCHETTE: Exactly.

MAN: And that's why I always felt his work was so effective.
But....

TUCKER: You and I...

MAN: ...even so, I imagine at most, you're saying, it's
just good entertainment.

MARCHETTE: Yes. That's what I'm saying.

TUCKER: You and I must read the same kind of--same authors.
The same books, I guess.

MAN: We must read the same books.

TUCKER: Yes. Thanks for calling.

MAN: Thank you.

TUCKER: Bye-bye. Can I ask you something?

MARCHETTE: Yes.

TUCKER: What are you going to do? Do you have any plans?
I'm just interested.

MARCHETTE: Yes. I've written another novel, another espionage
novel. It's in first draft.

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TUCKER: Oh.

MARCHETTE: I've started on the second draft but I've set that aside temporarily because I have now an opportunity to do some non-fiction work, critical analysis and hopefully leading to some reform and reorganization in the intelligence community, and I want to work on that. It may only result in a few articles; it may turn out to be a book eventually.

TUCKER: Yeah. In some of those--'cause you were a very-- a colonel, a full colonel, or equivalent...

MARCHETTE: Yes.

TUCKER: ...in the CIA. In any of those meetings, in intelligence, did you ever think of letting a guy return who quit the CIA to write a novel and still be a CIA member?

MARCHETTE: It's done all the time.

TUCKER: It is?

(LAUGHTER)

Well, it's good having you on the show again.

(LAUGHTER)

MARCHETTE: Come with me.

TUCKER: I'll be leaving now. Victor Marchette is the author of "The Rope-Dancer," "The Rope-Dancer," and all you people like that last one who called who read the books I do, will want to read this. Grosset and Dunlap is the publisher now.

MARCHETTE: John, can I say one thing before I go?

TUCKER: Yeah, sure.

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MARCHETTE: You must be one of the nicest guys in television and it's a pleasure meeting you.

TUCKER: Oh. It's a pleasure meeting you, and I'll be back in a minute.